

And then there's the question of waivers

The Bethlehem Gadfly coronavirus, Martin Tower April 24, 2020

 *Latest in a series of posts on the coronavirus* 

Ok, so we know Martin Tower has been a sore issue.

So Gadfly thought it was a great observation by a follower that the health hazard some of us were worrying about there last year at this time seems so insignificant now.

Great perspective.

But Martin Tower remains a sore issue.

Work continues at Martin Tower during this shut down.

Gadfly followers noticed, some out of detached wry cynicism about special privilege having its privilege, others miffed that their incomes were snuffed because their employers were shut down. *How is Martin Tower construction going on when my construction job is shut down?*

Gadfly inquired of the City. Director of Community Development Alicia Karner acted promptly, sending an inspector to the site. Karner said work at Martin Tower at the beginning of the shut down was associated with logging and landscaping, both activities deemed essential by the Commonwealth. So far so good. But this time the inspector noted additional activity, beyond logging and landscaping. Karner's office asked for a copy of a waiver from the state by today or the work would be shut down. The waiver was produced. The work is permitted. There is no indication why the waiver was permitted by the state.

(A tip o' the hat to Ms. Karner for prompt action!)

Now about rationales for waivers, this article in today's *Morning Call* is instructive:

Cynthia Fernandez, "There's no timeline to release list of Pa. businesses that received coveted coronavirus waivers, top official says.." Morning Call/Spotlight, April 23, 2020.

More than a month after the process was first announced, there is still no timeline for when Gov. Tom Wolf's administration will release the list of Pennsylvania businesses that received coveted waivers and were allowed to reopen during the ongoing coronavirus shutdown.

During a hearing Thursday, members of the Republican-controlled state Senate lambasted the secretive nature of the waiver process, arguing that the state was deciding the fate of businesses without providing any transparency, leading to confusion and inconsistencies even among businesses in the same industry.

“With such an unprecedented situation comes unprecedented decisions, with no handbook or established guidelines,” Sen. Mike Regan (R., York) said. “Senate colleagues from both sides of the aisle have expressed frustration that waivers were issued and denied with no basis, and especially with no transparency.”

In March, Wolf shuttered most of the state's economy in an effort to slow the spread of the coronavirus. But in a nod to the complexity of the situation, the governor opened up a waiver process to allow businesses to make the case for why they should be allowed to reopen.

The stakes of the waiver process cannot be overstated, as the state's decisions affect the livelihoods and potential safety of business owners, employees, and their families, and could mean the difference between solvency and bankruptcy.

Of the 42,000 applications submitted, 22,000 were granted a waiver or informed that they were already considered “life-sustaining,” state officials said. The secretary of the economic development agency, Dennis M. Davin, told lawmakers the process did not favor certain businesses and insisted the 45-person team made decisions in good faith.

Wonder what reason the owners of the Martin Tower site gave to secure their waiver. Though the waiver process doesn't seem all that difficult if about 50% of the petitioners succeeded in getting a waiver.

Gadfly guesses there may be reason to hold on to some cynicism about the Tower saga.